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Zuckerberg Programs New Website

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Having seemingly conquered the realm of social networking, the creator of the popular website thefacebook.com will take at least a semester off to pursue his next online project.

Mark E. Zuckerberg '06-'07 said he has spent the summer in Palo Alto, Calif., with collaborators working on a new website called Wirehog, a file-sharing site that will be integrated with thefacebook.com. He said he hopes to launch the new site on Aug. 25, although it may be delayed until the first week of September.

"It's more complicated than most of the stuff I've done before, but at the end of the day, the user experience is going to be really simple," Zuckerberg said.

File sharing was the craze first started by Napster, the software that allowed users to download popular music from other people's computers.

To help meet the challenge of programming the Wirehog site, Zuckerberg enlisted the help of several friends, including Andrew K. McCollum '06-'07 and roommate Dustin A. Moskovitz '06-'07.

To devote time to the development of his two websites, Zuckerberg said he and the other Harvard programmers will withdraw from the College for the fall semester and possibly for the spring as well.

Zuckerberg said his grades suffered while he managed the explosion of thefacebook.com last semester.

"I hope that I wouldn't have to run two websites and go to school," Zuckerberg said. "I tried doing that in the spring [2004] term with one website, and that didn't work out so well."

Zuckerberg said he did not anticipate being the principal programmer of both Wirehog and thefacebook.com if and when he does return to the College.

He added that when he returns to the College would partially be determined by the popularity of Wirehog; the less popular the site, the more likely his return for the spring semester.

In addition to his work on the new website, Zuckerberg said he also plans to upload an overhaul to thefacebook.com next Thursday or Friday, but declined to discuss specific details.

Napster's file-sharing service attracted legal troubles because it enabled users to trade copyrighted materials illegally. In 2001, Napster, Inc. offered the recording industry $1 billion to settle copyright infringement lawsuits, and a federal injunction requiring the company to block illegal downloads ultimately crippled the free song-swapping service.

Unlike Napster and other similar programs, Zuckerberg said, Wirehog was not designed to allow for the illegal distribution of copyrighted materials. Rather, he said, he envisioned his site as a venue for friends to upload and share personal files, like pictures.

The Wirehog software will be downloadable to a personal computer from the website www.wirehog.com. When the software is initially launched, it will search the user's computer and upload certain default files like music to a user's Wirehog page on the internet, Zuckerberg said. Users will be able choose to upload other files.

"There are privacy preferences so you can specify who gets your stuff on a file-by-file basis," Zuckerberg said.

Once the website is set up, other Wirehog users can download files to their own computers.

Zuckerberg said there would be a mechanism to track the most popular downloads to facilitate the spread of local bands' music.

"If Chester French comes out with a bunch of new music at Wirehog, they'll upload it and their friends will get it. There will be an advertising mechanism to see what's hot in the network," Zuckerberg said. "It gives people who don't really have an advertising network a chance to get their stuff out."

Zuckerberg did not deny that his site could be used for the spread of copyrighted MP3 files, but added that the possibility did not mean that his program should be viewed as illicit.

"People can use this for uploading files that are copyrighted. People can also use [AOL Instant Messenger] for that, or they can use e-mail for that," he said. "The fact that people can use it for those things doesn't inherently make the program bad."

He added, "A lot of content people will be using this for won't be infringing material."

Zuckerberg said Wirehog will be integrated with thefacebook.com so that facebook friends will be allowed to view files on a user's Wirehog page by default.

Additionally, users will receive links to their friends' Wirehog pages via thefacebook.com, Zuckerberg said. He added that, like on thefacebook.com, users' pages will be able to be browsed.

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